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NEWS RELEASE

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The Nation's First Free-Standing Forensic Medical Unit For Victims of Domestic Violence is Unveiled *Partnership with Sharp Grossmont Hospital and the San Diego Family Justice Center*

San Diego, CA: No more shame for victims of domestic violence! No more hiding their injuries! In the City of San Diego, victims of domestic violence can now seek the medical attention they need at the Sharp Grossmont Hospital Forensic Medical Unit at the nationally recognized San Diego Family Justice Center. Today, the nation's first free-standing Forensic Medical Unit for the treatment, evaluation and documentation of domestic violence injuries was unveiled to the news media and community. The Forensic Medical Unit documents evidence more extensively, and medical staff is expertly trained and educated in domestic violence-specific areas such as strangulation and mutilation. "We are setting a standard for the rest of the country to follow and, with the leadership of Sharp Grossmont Hospital and their CEO Michele Tarbet, we have set a very high standard with this Medical Unit," said City Attorney Casey Gwinn, who provided the vision for the San Diego Family Justice Center.

The free-standing Forensic Medical Unit is a private suite with two medical exam rooms and staff offices. Victims will not have to wait in non-secure public areas or busy hospital-based emergency departments for care. The Unit is secure, confidential and private, providing victims with assurance that they are safe. It is staffed by a full-time forensic nurse practitioner, Amy Carney, and two half-time emergency medicine physicians who are national experts in the field of domestic violence injuries: Dr. George McClane and Dr. Ellen Taliaferro. Additional staff will be added as the unit continues to grow. "It is exciting to be a part of this innovative center where patients can be evaluated in a secure environment by a caring and compassionate staff," said Sharp Grossmont CEO Michele Tarbet.

"What makes the Forensic Medical Unit truly unique is that it is part of a collaborative involving law enforcement, forensic medicine and the City Attorney's office," said Dr. McClane who is the Medical Director of the Forensic Medical Unit. "It is a place where victims of domestic violence – whether they are young or old – can go to be treated and where injuries can be forensically evaluated." McClane adds that forensic medicine is a crucial element in prosecuting perpetrators of domestic violence. "The forensically-based evidence plays a major role in solving the crime," said Dr. McClane.

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The Forensic Medical Unit at the Family Justice Center began operating April 1, 2003, and saw its first patient on May 1, 2003. To date it has provided medical care to 117 victims of domestic violence which include both men and women. The types of injuries handled at the Forensic Medical Unit include contusions, abrasions, minor lacerations or sprains, as well as injuries to the head, neck, chest breasts, abdomen, arms, and legs. Injuries that are life threatening will be referred to local hospital emergency rooms. Victims have sought medical care at the Forensic Medical Unit or have been referred by the San Diego Police Department. "In many domestic violence cases, it is essential to document the victim's injuries as quickly as possible," said Police Chief William Lansdowne. "The Family Justice Center's Forensic Medical Unit provides one more opportunity to collect detailed evidence and share it with prosecutors housed at the Family Justice Center. When abusers are prosecuted and held accountable for their crimes, it is much more difficult for them to re-offend."

The Forensic Medical Unit's care includes: documentation of external/internal injuries and follow-up documentation; preservation of physical evidence for prosecution of abusers; detection of internal injuries caused by strangulation or blunt force trauma; detection of mental health and psychiatric symptoms; intervention in cases involving pregnant women; patient/victim education and safety; continuity of care and long-term support for victims; communication and collaboration among all intervention professionals; statistical record keeping and research; and education, awareness and outreach to hospitals and clinics about the Forensic Medical Unit and the Family Justice Center. The Unit also provides referrals for well-child check ups, and women's care.

According to Dr. McClane, who is also a Sharp Grossmont Hospital emergency department physician, other similar forensic units across the country may only work with specific populations such as child abuse or are located within a hospital and do not provide the comprehensive services and access to the continuum of care. "Most importantly, after they receive their medical exam, all the social services and law enforcement services they need are right there in the building," said Assistant City Attorney Gael Strack, the on-site coordinator of the Family Justice Center.

The Forensic Medical Unit was unveiled today at a news conference and reception at the Family Justice Center located in downtown San Diego at 707 Broadway. City Attorney Casey Gwinn, Mayor Dick Murphy, City Council member Jim Madaffer, Police Chief Bill Lansdowne, Fire Chief Jeff Bowman, Sharp Grossmont Hospital CEO Michele Tarbet and the Medical Director of the Forensic Medical Unit Dr. George McClane were in attendance, as well as medical practitioners and community supporters of the Family Justice Center.

Sharp Grossmont Hospital, part of Sharp HealthCare, one of the nation's leading health care systems is the largest and most comprehensive health care facility serving East San Diego County. Sharp Grossmont Hospital offers programs in cardiac care, oncology, women's services, pediatrics, rehabilitation, orthopedics, mental health and hospice. Grossmont also offers extensive outpatient services and prevention programs such as sleep disorder care, wound care, senior health center, diabetes and hyperbaric medicine and is the busiest emergency room in the county. For more information about Sharp Grossmont Hospital, visit www.sharp.com. Sharp Grossmont CEO Michele Tarbet led the effort to build a partnership with the Family Justice Center to make this unique, innovative Unit a reality. "It never would have happened without the leadership of Michele Tarbet. Her willingness to step out and lead, when no one else would, has now given an incredible example for every hospital administrator in the country," said City Attorney Gwinn.

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Last Wednesday, at a White House ceremony, President George W. Bush announced the “President’s Family Justice Center Initiative,” which will create 12 family justice centers for victims of domestic violence across the nation, modeled after the San Diego Family Justice Center. The San Diego Family Justice Center is America’s most comprehensive “one stop shop” justice center for victims of domestic violence, bringing together under one roof the entire domestic violence units of a police department and prosecutor’s office. In addition, there are 20 on-site community agencies at the Family Justice Center. For more information: familyjusticecenter.org

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